

From the Institute for Integrative Healthcare Studies – September 22, 2005 - Inflammation is newly recognized as a leading factor in ALL types of diseases. *Learn to differentiate between inflammation-reducing foods and inflammation-perpetuating foods. This insight just may put the pharmaceutical giants out of business.*

Anti-Inflammatory Foods - Eating food is necessary to sustain life; however, eating the right foods will sustain your health. While many of us spend an enormous amount of time and expense on medical, pharmaceutical, herbal and alternative therapies for our ailments, the solution might be right at home in our kitchens.

The number of people looking for relief from their pain is staggering. According to a 2005 ABC News/USA Today/Stanford University Medical Center poll, 34 percent of Americans are in recurrent (on-again and off-again) pain and 19 percent are in chronic (lasting three months or more) pain. That's a huge chunk of our population that is seeking every way possible to reduce their pain.

Inflammation is a significant component of the experience of pain. The body's immune system initiates an inflammatory response when an injury occurs. In the case of an acute physical injury, this serves us well; by bringing the necessary cellular components to the injury so healing can occur. However, when it comes to chronic pain, inflammation perpetuates our experience of pain. Many pain relief modalities focus on reducing this chronic inflammation.

In addition to pain, inflammation is emerging in medical research as a predominant factor in a myriad of diseases from arthritis to heart disease to cancer. Measurable risk factors for disease-related inflammation includes elevated cholesterol, triglycerides and C reactive protein. Recent studies indicate that a measure of C reactive protein (which the body produces in response to inflammation) may be the strongest predictor of heart disease.

The foods that we eat have a direct connection to the functioning of our body. As our digestion breaks down what we eat, the building blocks of those foods are absorbed by different systems. When it comes to inflammation, certain foods aggravate it and others can prevent it. Jack Challem, author of *The Inflammation Syndrome* says, "...the body can become like a dry field of grass that is waiting for a match. Once the match lights, it's hard to put out the fire." In this context, Challem is referring to someone who eats a typical American diet, which is abundant in foods that aggravate inflammation.

According to Molly Siple, MS, RD, in the September 2005 magazine edition of *Natural Health*, foods that **aggravate** inflammation include:

- 1) Foods high in arachidonic acid. Examples include wheat, eggs, milk, yeast and meat.
- 2) Vegetable oils high in omega-6 fatty acids. Examples include sunflower oil, corn oil, peanut oil, soy oil, cottonseed oil and safflower oil.
- 3) Foods that cause spikes in blood sugar. Examples include sugar, refined white flour, fried potatoes and sugary beverages.

Foods that **protect** you from inflammation include:

- 1) Food that contains polyphenols, which dampen inflammation with phytochemicals. Examples include blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, cranberries, cherries and green tea.
- 2) Quercetin containing foods. This flavanoid is also a natural anti-inflammatory. Examples include red grapes, red and yellow onions, garlic, broccoli and apples.
- 3) Antioxidants protect the body from free radicals, which can trigger inflammation. Examples of foods high in antioxidants are carrots, winter squash, bell peppers, tomatoes, spinach and kale.
- 4) Omega-3 fatty acids have significant anti-inflammatory properties. Omega-3's can inhibit natural inflammatory chemicals such as prostaglandins and leukotrienes. According to Andrew Weil, MD, "Inflammation is regulated by a group of hormones called prostaglandins. Some prostaglandins intensify the inflammatory response while others reduce it. Aspirin, ibuprofen and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs work on the prostaglandin system. The body makes prostaglandins from fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids tend to decrease inflammation while omega-6 fats and trans fats increase inflammation." Examples of foods rich in omega-3's are salmon, tuna, mackerel, anchovies, sardines, flaxseed oil, dark leafy greens and walnuts.
- 5) Oleic Acid contains omega-9 fatty acids, which supports the omega-3's. Examples of foods rich in omega-9's are almonds, macadamia nuts, canola oil and olive oil. Researchers at the Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia reported on olive oil in the September 1, 2005 issue of *Nature*. Their tests showed that a component of extra virgin olive oil, oleocanthal, inhibited cox-1 and cox-2 molecules associated with pain and inflammation, just as ibuprofen does.
- 6) Turmeric is an Indian spice that gives curry its color, and has a long history of use as an anti-inflammatory herb in many traditional medicines.

When choosing food, a general rule of thumb seems to be: the brighter the color the better. This is a broad statement, and doesn't count fruits, vegetables or fish that have been artificially colored. Following the above dietary guidelines by avoiding foods that contribute to inflammation and including foods that prevent inflammation can make a dramatic impact on your health. Whether your concern is arthritis, diabetes, heart disease or cancer, you can reduce your reliance upon the medical community by eating for your health.

